



Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Language & Communication

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom

Interactionally achieving face in criticism–criticism response exchanges

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 6 June 2013

Keywords:

Face
Viva
Conversation analysis
Talk
Criticism

ABSTRACT

Arundale's Face Constituting Theory is used to examine the way face is conjointly co-constituted in criticism–criticism response exchanges in PhD vivas in Iran. This approach carried out in CA tradition on institutional talk makes it possible to explain how face is achieved in the manner grounded in the interactants' perspective. The analysis concentrates on two excerpts of talk drawn from a corpus of 12 PhD vivas. The findings show how interactants conjointly constitute meanings and social actions and at the same time establish relational connection and separation.

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1. Introduction

This article pioneers a new line of enquiry into criticism actions in PhD vivas, focusing on the sequential organization of criticism–criticism response interactions and the interactional achievement of face (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). The notion of face as understood here is associated with Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (henceforth "FCT"), which is defined as "participants' understandings of relational connectedness and separateness conjointly co-constituted in talk/conduct-in-interaction" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2078). This essentially means that face achievement is accomplished relationally as well as interactionally as an integral part of but distinct from meaning-action achievement.

The investigation focuses on the way Iranian speakers of English conjointly coconstruct criticism–criticism response exchanges in the context of PhD vivas in Iran, in a culture oriented towards relationship building. Iranians are bound by rules of politeness linked to *âberu*, a concept of face which is "associated with a schema that embodies the image of a person ... particularly as viewed by others in the society" (Sharifian, 2007, p. 36). In this culture, "politeness does not seem to be motivated by the face concerns of the participants, ... but by their social standing in respect to others in their group (Reiter, 2009, p. 168). This is clearly reflected in the notion of *taarof* a ritual courtesy defined as compliments, ceremony, good manners, soft tongue, honeyed phrases, respect (Koutlaki, 2002, p. 1741), which is regarded as indispensable in Iranian interaction. Another two interrelated concepts concerned with face are *shaxsiat* and *ehteram*. A speaker's *shaxsiat* or pride depends on the way he behaves, which is perceived as indicative of his upbringing. *Ehteram* or honour refers to the respect shown to one another by adhering to norms of behaviour "according to the addressee's position, age, status and interlocutors' relationship" (Koutlaki, 2002, p. 1742). Vivas are predominantly made up of potentially negative pragmatic acts (Mey, 2001), such as criticisms and evaluations which may negatively affect interpersonal relationships between interactants and lead to conflict. Thus relational phenomena such as face and politeness acquire a more substantial meaning (Grimshaw, 1989, pp. 522–523).

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The specific aim is to analyze the way participants achieve face interactionally while performing and responding to acts of criticism, which is essentially a dyadic activity, taking into account the interactive context in which it occurs. The analysis will be guided by the following questions:

1. How do criticism and criticism response unfold across sequences of talk?
2. How are relational connection and separation conjointly achieved in criticism–criticism response interaction?

The sequential organization of talk forms the primary analytic utility in describing talk as action and also its relation to interaction (Schegloff, 1991). Drawing on Conversation Analysis (CA) we adopt an interactional approach taking into account both the addressor's production and the addressee's response, treating "meaning as the understandings that participants display to each other in the sequential organization of talk" (Kasper, 2006, p. 296).

In what follows we discuss the relevant literature on face and politeness and also on criticism, and relate it to the aim of this article. Following the methodology, we analyze two samples of criticism exchange to determine how participants actually do criticism–criticism response and relational work in a context in which evaluation is the *raison d'être*. Finally, we discuss the findings in relation to broader issues including the situational context invoked by the participants, the institutional practice of a PhD viva and Iranian culture.

2. Face, politeness and criticism in interaction

We view face "in terms of the relationship two or more persons create with one another in interaction" which is distinct "from the understandings of face in terms of person-centred attributes like social identity, public self-image, or social wants that characterize existing theories" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2078). The move towards seeing face as concerned with relationships and conjointly co-constituted in the interaction is consistent with the constructivist view that social phenomena are interactionally achieved and that "communication is a joint and collaborative activity" (Editorial, 2010, p. 2074). Arundale argues that an encoding/decoding model of communication, which is not grounded in interaction, cannot successfully account for the property of emergence or interactional achievement that characterizes communication in general (Arundale, 1999, pp. 122–124, 2006, p. 195). On the other hand, the Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication is able to explain meaning "as social, and specifically as interactional" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2085). The interpersonal dialectic of connection and separation is "the principal or fundamental dialectic in relationships because no relationship exists except as two separate or differentiated individuals achieve some form of social connection or unity." (Arundale, 1999, p. 9, cited in Arundale (2010, p. 2086)).

Goffman's view that face "is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter" (1967, p. 7) appears on the surface to be consistent with FCT's notion of face. However, despite alluding to the importance of interaction, face is still firmly rooted in the cognition of individuals (Editorial, 2010, p. 2074). This conceptualization of face has two limitations. First, it is concerned with the protection and enhancement of the interlocutor's self image, which has been criticized as not universal (Locher and Watts, 2005, p. 16). Secondly, its conceptualization as arising "through pre-established patterns of action" (Arundale, 2006) and being embedded in "an intention-based transmission model of communication" (Editorial, 2010, p. 2) is not consistent with the "emergent, contingent and interactional nature" of face (Lerner, 1996) which requires interaction to be at the centre of the analysis of face and where meanings are negotiated through our engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

The application of Goffman's notion of face in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987) has resulted in an ongoing debate concerned in particular with the conflation of politeness with face. Brown and Levinson's positive and negative politeness differs from both Goffman's elaboration of face (and facework) and Durkheim's "positive and negative rituals" (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003, p. 1460), and Chinese *Mianzi* ("a desire to secure public acknowledgement") and *Lian* ("a desire to be liked and to be approved of by others") (Ma Yingxin, 2008, p. 210). The original concept of face which is derived from Chinese face is intimately linked to "the views of the community and to the community's judgment and perception of the individual's character and behaviour" (Ma Yingxin, 2008, p. 210), and what is emphasized is "the harmony of individual conduct with the views and judgment of the community" (p. 210). Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) postulates that Brown and Levinson selectively adopt the individualistic aspect of Goffman's face disregarding its social orientation (Werkhofner, 1992, p. 178) and turn it into a cognitive individualistic construct based on Western ethnocentric assumptions. This model has been criticized by researchers working on eastern languages including Japanese (e.g. Matsumoto, 1988), Chinese (Chen, 1993) and Persian (Koutlaki, 2002) who argue for a collectivistic view of face to reflect the importance given to group rather than individual face and the dependence of one's social standing and reputation on society's recognition.

Locher and Watts' discursive approach (2005) represents a post-modern take on politeness. They argue that the theory of politeness "is not in fact a theory of politeness, but rather a theory of facework, dealing only with the mitigation of face threatening acts" (Locher and Watts, 2005, p. 10) and "Brown and Levinson's can still be used ... if we look at the strategies they have proposed to possible relations of ... relational work" (Locher and Watts, 2005, p. 10). The pre-eminence of politeness in the sense of face is thus being questioned (Locher, 2004). Although it is here to stay, "the form it takes remains a consideration for us all" (Bousfield, 2006, p. 11). Haugh (2007) calls attention to the key issues still left unresolved by the discursive approach (see e.g. Locher 2006; Locher and Watts, 2005), and one of them is concerned with "how researchers

can identify instances of (im)politeness without imposing the analysts' understandings" (p. 295). To overcome this, Haugh (2007) proposes that analysts look for evidence that emerges in the sequential unfolding of the talk itself to see how relational connection and separation is dialectically constituted, where "each participant's cognitive processes in interpreting and designing are responsive to prior, current, or potential contributions the other participants make to the stream of interaction" (Arundale, 2005, p. 59). Haugh (2007) further postulates that this dialectic approach "... can account for both the universal and culture-specific" (p. 17) aspects of politeness.

In this article we support the move to examine face in real interaction and analyze face as a separate entity in its own right independently of politeness. We adopt FCT's notion of face, which draws attention to the relational and interpersonal aspects of face, and this is viewed as "a possible way forward in perhaps resolving some of these issues around the definition of face" (Arundale, 2006, cited in Editorial, 2010, p. 2073). According to Arundale "the practices of interaction through which persons achieve connection with others and separation from them must be integral with the practices of interaction through which they achieve meanings and actions" (2010, p. 2087) which motivates the investigation of the way participants achieve face while performing criticism.

There is a dearth of research on criticism; most studies are confined to a small set of speech acts including requests, greetings and compliments (Tracy and Eisenberg, 1990). Tracy et al. (1987, p. 56) define criticism as the act of "finding fault" which involves giving "a negative evaluation of a person or an act for which he or she is deemed responsible". In the context of politeness research, work on criticism centres on face and politeness and the use of face-saving strategies to mitigate the threat to face (Yuan, 2010). Criticism aimed at the addressee is a potential threat to his face and does not address his face wants (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 70). To downplay the threat, the addresser uses mitigating strategies and temporarily delays the criticism by prefacing it with hesitations, repetition, back-channel responses and other devices (Kuo, 1994). The choice of strategies will be influenced by how the participants conceive conflict, which is itself based on cultural norms, social variables, or ecological constraints (Grimshaw, 1990) and institutional expectations (Robles, 2011).

The face-threatening perspective brings into focus the socially disruptive nature of criticism in that its occurrence "jeopardizes participants' drive towards an interpersonal consensus" (Robles, 2011). However, insights from recent research seem to suggest that there is no act that is intrinsically face threatening (Fukushima, 2002). According to Chang and Haugh (2011, p. 2948), "whether an action is face-threatening, and the degree of face-threat, depends on the evaluations and responses of participants in particular interactions relative to their interpersonal histories and broader sociocultural expectation ..., as well as their individual (or mutual) interactional goals ...". Culture-situated understanding of face requires consideration of factors relating to personal values such as "one's own self-concept, self-identity in various groupings, role expectations and normative constraints" (Earley, 1997, pp. 95–96; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003, p. 1463) and universal cultural dimensions including individualism–collectivism and power distance.

3. Methods

3.1. Data

The two sets of interaction analyzed in Section 4 come from a corpus of 12 PhD vivas amounting to 16 h and 19 min of talk-in-interaction video-recorded as part of a doctoral research project at the University of Malaya. The selected excerpts are taken from the question–answer interaction of two viva sessions, each consisting of approximately 10 min of talk-in-interaction. The total length of talk for Excerpt 1 is approximately 2 h and Excerpt 2 1 h. In each case the examiner is referred to as EX and the candidate as C. The recordings are transcribed according to the Jefferson conventions, with utterance numbers added for ease of reference. The transcripts provide information relating to some aspects of turn-taking such as latching and overlapping, which are important for our analysis, but do not provide a precise marking of prosodic cues such as loudness, pause length and the change in the pitch contour.

3.2. Approach

We draw on an approach grounded in CA which focuses on "interpretations that are demonstrably oriented towards participant actions" (Bani-Shoraka, 2005). In our attempt to characterize face and criticism acts in the on-going interaction we do not postulate *a priori* independent of it, but examine the emergent properties as participants conjointly co-constitute criticism-responses and relational work in contextually-sensitive empirical data. The data is analyzed in order to see how relational connection and separation is conjointly and collaboratively constructed in criticism sequences. CA explains utterance meaning according to the response it elicits (Bilmes, 1986, p. 132), which essentially means that an act is a criticism as long as it is interpreted as such by the participant in the interactions.

Investigating face in real interaction and as a relational phenomenon requires the adoption of the Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication (Arundale, 1999) which is appropriate not only because it conceptualizes face as "the on-going, conjoint co-constituting of connection with and separation from others in relationships", but also because it conceptualizes this process as coordinate with "the conjoint co-constituting of meaning and action in talk/conduct-in-interaction" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2079). Although the achieving of face is integral with the achieving of meaning and action, "interpretations of face comprise an order of interpretations distinct from interpretations of meaning or of action" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2088). Under-

standing the practices of ‘doing relating’ is different from understanding the practices of ‘doing criticizing’ (Robinson, 2006, p. 154; cited in Arundale, 2010, p. 2088). While doing relational work is person-oriented concerned with interpersonal, doing criticizing is meaning-action oriented revolved around specific topics or ideas raised in the interaction.

4. Analysis

4.1. Excerpt 1: qualitative research

The interaction involves a 40 year old female candidate (C) and a 40 year old female assistant professor who is the second examiner (EX). This particular interaction took place about 45 min after the beginning of the viva. It consists of sequences of criticism–criticism response which evidence the way the participants conjointly co-construct relational connection and separation in their relationship, articulate with the achieving of particular meanings and actions in specific moments of talk. The exchange extends over nine turns, EX questioning, criticizing and rejecting C’s explanation, and C disagreeing, explaining and defending her position, and finally conceding indirectly. What is at issue at the beginning of the exchange is the organization of C’s thesis, which later develops into questioning the nature of the thesis itself, i.e. whether it is in actual fact qualitative.

Excerpt 1

1	EX	(.) one of the major problems I had with your work was was one of
2		organization, ok? Erm (.) that doesn’t have to do with just with the writing
3		(.) I mean a kind of jumping around a bit but I really got confused trying
4		to follow (.) the study itself (.) because erm for example (.) you didn’t
5		have a one to one correspondence between your research questions and
6		the data analyses (.) so you have four questions and then you have tons
7		and tons and tons of data and analysis (.) and I couldn’t tell where do (.)
8		where these were[coming from]
9	C	[u:h you know] erm (..) what I used in my research was
10		(.) for research question was the qualitative there=
11	EX	=Mhm, even you see I am familiar with qualitative research. Actually I
12		would like to make the clai:m (.) that what you did was not called
13		qualitative by many people (.) ok?
14	C	(.) erm you know in qualitative research usu usually you have to have
15		triangulation of sources er er=
16	EX	=uh (.) you mentioned in your presentation that you have done
17		triangulation. You actually have not erm (.) done triangulation (.)
18		triangulation is for answering one particular question (.) You use several
19		methods (..) several <u>approaches</u> or several uh (..) raters etc etc (.) but what
20		you have done actually (.) for each question you have a set of (.) data (.)
21		or whatever (.) just (.) presenting percentages (.) uh wouldn’t really
22		consist (.) of uh qualitative research (.) and [erm]
23	C	[but] but I have used
24		interviews (.) Erm and some of the claims that you say are not
25		substantiated (.) are coming from the interviews that I had
26	EX	[Ok. I am glad you
27		mentioned that because erm (.) I really couldn’t find I mean (.) I I actually
28		wrote (.) for you like one or two places that (..) WHY didn’t you have int-
29		an interview? Yeah I did because I didn’t see anything in your
30		instrumentation. (.) Erm you didn’t mention it in your instrumentation=
31	C	=Erm I thought I thought that it’s getting too bulky (.) so (.) I I (.) had to
32		(.) you know cross out [some of the question]
33	EX	[I think there are <u>lot of</u>] other things you could
34		have (.) crossed out (.) but I don’t think you could have eliminated (.) uh
35		your (.) tools.

In accordance with the principle of recipient design, EX designs her first turn (lines 1–8) constructing her critical comments for C's benefit which in the specific context of a viva and her role as examiner can be seen as supportive despite the negativity, orienting towards some degree of connection. As she constructs her turn she projects C's interpreting of it which will remain provisional until C's second position uptake. At this juncture C's soft voice quality is suggesting that it is more supportive than confrontational, and this is further supported by the positive comments at the beginning of the viva. Based on the knowledge and presuppositions shared by EX and C (that EX has read C's thesis, and she is conducting herself as examiner in the context of assessment), EX constructs her turn to be interpreted as criticism projecting interpretable connection for C to respond appropriately. It sets constraints on C's next action, such that C is accountable for immediately responding to EX's negative evaluation which orients to separation. Within a single turn, EX displays affiliation and support projecting orientation to connection, and disaffiliation projecting orientation to separation as she continually addresses the dialectical tension between her individuality and sociality (Arundale, 2010).

EX's initial comment, "one of the major problems I had with your work (.) was one of organization, ok?..." (lines 1–2), which identifies exactly what the problem is, while face threatening is actually expected in a viva. The "OK" produced with a rise and a particular voice quality at the end of the utterance suggests that EX is seeking confirmation that the candidate is actually following what she is saying which in the specific moment of talk is supportive of C. This is followed by detailed explanation of what the problems are (lines 2–8), an action likely to be avoided in ordinary conversation, but allowable in a viva. EX enacts her role as examiner orienting to the task at hand which projects an interpreting of relational separation. Notice the disassociation from C in the use of 'I', a self-referencing which evokes a personal identity, in relation to 'you' as a separate identity from 'I'. EX uses 'you' to make a direct reference to what C did wrong and 'I' to call attention to the negative effect it has on her as examiner, e.g. in "I couldn't tell where do (.) where these were coming from" (line 8). Although the utterances may on the surface appear to be threatening on account of their very clarity, they can be seen as supportive, as they reduce the risk of misinterpretation (see e.g. Wajnryb, 1995). They evidence some degree of relational connection such that EX's detailed and explicit comments give C a chance to respond accordingly, but at the same time their negativity evidences orientation to relational separation.

There is some attempt to mitigate the threat to face by using an expression of uncertainty "a kind of" (line 3) and a downtoning device "a bit" in "I mean a kind of jumping around a bit" (line 4), immediately after the unmoderated criticism at the beginning of the turn (lines 1–2). The use of mitigating devices which attends to C's face wants projects interpretations of some degree of relational connection. However, the choice of strong words (e.g. "you didn't have ... you have ...", lines 4–7) upgrades the strength of the criticisms suggesting orientation towards relational separation. Notice how the adverb "really" intensifies EX's confusion (line 3). Likewise uttering the word *tons* three times in "tons and tons and tons of data and analysis", and the personalized explicit remark "I couldn't tell where do-where these were coming from" together clearly reflect the examiner's annoyance and exemplify the criticism that she made about the organization of the thesis earlier on. In designing her turn, EX orients to the dialectical interplay of connection and separation.

In response, C overlaps EX's utterance. The incoming (line 9) is audibly stronger than the current turn (line 8), which is withheld until EX yields her turn. Instead of responding to EX's critical comments about the lack of organization, C gives an account of her work: "what I used in my research was for research question was the qualitative ..." (lines 9–10) which together with the overlapping in coming displays disaffiliation. At the same time C is projecting interpretations of some degree of connection in their relationship which can be inferred by the use of mitigating devices (e.g. pausing and a device for buying time "you know"), the hesitant tone of voice and the act of dropping out before turn completion. These interpretations are provisional until C's third position uptake.

The design of EX's subsequent response beginning with "Mhm" (line 11) seems on the surface to be an acknowledgement, but the accompanying crescendo rise points to a more aggressive interpretation. EX takes issue with C's assertion that her research is qualitative, which is being problematized in the current turn. From EX's uptake C has some evidence that EX interprets her utterance as involving some degree of separation and can now take that interpreting as operative. The unhedged criticisms and the use of personalization (lines 11–13) evidences EX's orientation to relational separation. EX enters into a direct unmitigated disagreement with C. We note the positive words that go with *I* e.g. "I am familiar with qualitative research" which contrasts with the negative words that go with *you* e.g. "what you did was not called qualitative by many people" (lines 12–13) and the use of the quantifier *many* as opposed to *some* or *a few*. EX evokes the institutionalized claim to superior knowledge which evidences orientation to separation. She begins the criticism with "Actually, I would like to make the claim...". *Actually* means that in reality and contrary to C's own assertion (lines 9–10), her work is not qualitative. The phrase *would like* is a kind of 'mock hedge'. On the surface it appears as if EX is mitigating her claim, but the reality is that she is in a position of power to enforce her will and make the claim. The utterance, structured like a tag question, is actually an assertion of critical opinion, powerfully tilted towards "Yes". Calling attention to her knowledge about qualitative research

before producing the strong criticism denies C the option to disagree. C “must recognize the speech act for what it is, and must respond appropriately” (Koester, 2006, 125).

C’s overlapping turn: “... but I have used interviews” (lines 14–15), which suggests that her work is qualitative, constitutes a defence of her previous position. This second defence is expressed in a soft and rather hesitant tone of voice. Her explanation begins with a brief pause, “erm” and “you know” followed by an account of what qualitative research is, which implies that her research is qualitative: “in qualitative research usually you have to have triangulation of sources”. The reassertion of her stand, which indirectly opposes EX’s stance, projects provisional interpreting of relational separation (that C disagrees with EX) and connection (that C is defending her position as a candidate) in their relationship.

EX evidences interpretations of C’s response (lines 14–15) to her critical comments (lines 11–13) as non-alignment. She begins by reiterating what C claims “You mentioned ... that you have done triangulation” followed by an unmitigated rejection of her claim “You actually have not done triangulation”, supported by some explanation. Notice the use of *actually* to emphasize that contrary to her claim, C has not in reality done triangulation at all. Lakoff (1973, p. 304) regards this outright insistence as ‘incontrovertibly rude’ as it leaves C with no option.

The design of C’s third defence projects interpreting of some degree of relational separation from EX, and will be operative on EX’s subsequent uptake. The in overlap (line 23) begins with *but*, which signals the orientation towards disagreeing, followed by an assertion that she has used interviews (lines 23–24). C then counters EX’s line of argument by alluding to what EX says (“... some of the claims that *you say* are not substantiated...” and providing support to prove otherwise (“... are coming from the interviews that I had”). This action evidences orientation to separation from EX which is consistent with EX’s subsequent turn which projects interpretations of separation. C’s defensive claim provides a basis for EX’s challenge: “... I really couldn’t find I mean. I actually wrote for you like one or two places that why you didn’t have an interview”, which puts C on the spot. Notice EX’s lack of mitigation. EX calls into question a contradiction between C’s claim and what she has actually done. The unmitigated question: “Why didn’t you have an interview?” presupposes and therefore puts into play in the exchange the proposition ‘you did not have any interviews’. Negative interrogatives are highly assertive as though asserting a position rather than merely asking a question (Heritage, 2002). This presupposition is supported by “... you didn’t mention it in your instrumentation”, which assuming it is true necessarily requires agreement. The design of EX’s shows orientation to separation and its interpretation will be confirmed with C’s uptake.

C replies with tentative defensive explanation, “I thought it is getting too bulky ...” (lines 31–32), which is logically consistent with a withdrawal from her previously stated position without making it explicit. As it stands, the reply is incoherent because it does not relate to EX’s previous words. However, if the proposition already in the air (“Why didn’t you have an interview?”) is included, the response can logically be extended “I did not have any interviews because...”. In this regard C is implicitly aligning herself to EX’s assertion orienting and projecting interpretations of some degree of connection. At the same by asserting what she feels (though hesitantly), she is projecting her independent view orienting to some degree of separation from EX. In response, EX designs a turn which is sequentially consistent with C’s utterances and evidences an interpreting of relational separation. EX’s overlapping turn (lines 34–35), which is uttered prosodically stronger than C’s current turn, conveys both tentativeness (“I *think*”) and a strong negative comment (“I *don’t think*”) that communicates “authoritative deliberation” (Maries and Vandenberg, 2000, p. 41). She begins with finding the common ground that there are “lots of other things you could have crossed out”, but disagrees with the actual items eliminated, which is much less aggressive than making a blunt assertion that C is in the wrong. Notice that “other” suggests that there that are other things with a higher priority to be “crossed out”. C accepts the examiner’s critique with a nod which evidences some kind of convergence followed by EX’s affiliative low ‘mhm’, which evidences her interpreting of relational connection at this specific moment in talk.

4.2. Excerpt 2: SFL

The second interaction contains a high level of conflict between the second external examiner EX aged 50 and the candidate C aged 34, both of whom are males. They are embroiled in a heated argument, with EX questioning and challenging, and C defending and supporting his own position. What is in contention is the inconsistency between C’s chosen line of enquiry, namely Discourse Analysis, and his field of study, “literature or second language learning or teaching” (lines 2–3). Given the nature of the interaction and the evidence of their meanings and actions that EX and C provide for each other suggests that in designing the first pair part (lines 1–8) for C as recipient, EX is projecting that C will interpret it as a request for an explanation and that C will respond appropriately. However, this interpreting is provisional and will only be operative on C’s uptake. EX’s question sets an agenda for response, and C is accountable in terms of this agenda. We now examine the excerpt in detail:

Excerpt 2

1	EX	You know my own question is that (.) why did you concern
2		yourself to do that? (..) You are a student of literature (.) or or
3		erm or second language learning or teaching?
4	C	(.) erm because my work starts from classrooms (.) the students
5		as I [said
6	EX	[I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
7		studies (..) your studies is related to what? (.) literature or or (.)
8		TEFL?= [I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
9	C	= my work is the recognition of contributions <u>of discourse</u>
10		<u>analysis to TEFL</u> .= [I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
11	EX	=uh huh?
12	C	(.) and I <u>believe</u> that (.) that this kind of research can be of
13		immense contributions as [attested]
14	EX	[that's your] <u>impression</u> (.) Your
15		work doesn't <u>prove</u> that= [I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
16	C	=no no my point to the place of <u>discourse</u> analysis in TEFL (..) <u>discourse</u>
17		in my literature and I cannot do that (.) because there is a very
18		large
19		[
20	EX	You see you spend <u>hundreds</u> of pages on ES EFL (.) and you
21		were not able to relate it all to to to to second language teaching
22	C	(..) erm (..) there (.) erm there (.) there is a mountain of
23		literature I can quote (.) in terms of the contribution of
24		discourse analysis and ES EFL to TEFL= [I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
25	EX	=You shouldn't quote them you (.) you (.) your job was to do
26		research on that (.) and try to relate discourse analysis to to to
27		TEFL (.) and you are not able to do (.) erm why <u>not</u> ? [I don't care what your work is (.) my concern is your
28	C	(..) erm (.) in my conclusion section
29		[
30	EX	Yeah I I I saw your impressions
31		(.) just your feelings your impressions your understandings
32	C	your bluh bluh bluh (.) but not your findings (.) my findings
33		[
34	EX	are not related to to to to TEFL at all

EX presents his first position turn in the form of two questions, which project C's interpreting and uptake. The first is a wh-question which demands an explanation ("Why did you concern yourself to do that?"), *that* being an anaphoric reference to Discourse Analysis; the second is an alternative interrogative which requires an 'either this or that' answer (lines 2–3). C responds (lines 1–3) to EX's wh-question with a reason, which is sequentially relevant but inconsistent with EX's projecting of C's uptake. This can be inferred from EX's third position utterances which address the inconsistency, an in overlap (line 6) causing C to lose his speakership which orients to and projects interpretations of separation. EX does not let the inconsistency pass. In fact, his responses "I don't care what your work is" (line 6) evidences what he feels about C's work, and "...my concern is your studies ... your studies ..." (lines 6–8) which makes an explicit distinction between work and studies render C's previous answer "my work starts ..." (lines 4–5) irrelevant, displaying high relational separation from C. Notice the repeated use of the word "studies." EX ends his turn with an alternative question "your studies is [sic] related to what? Literature or TEFL?", which demands an answer, either the one or the other, subjecting C to "investigative cross-questioning" (see [Greatbatch, 1992, p. 271](#)). The hearably critical turn marked by an interruptive in coming before possible completion (line 6), the explicit unhedged rejection with the pronoun 'I' and the nature of the question which constrains C's response orients to and projects interpretations of high relational separation from C. This will become operative on C's uptake.

In his fourth position turn, C answers the question, but ignores EX's distinction and continues to refer to "my work" (lines 9–10) which implicitly contradicts EX's version as reflected in the question (lines 7–8). It is designed not to follow sequentially from EX's third position utterances, but reasserts what C is asserting in second position utterance, pre-maturely inter-

rupted by EX's incoming (line 6). We note C's repetitive use of the phrase "My work" to bring his work back into focus again. As C designs his turn, EX acknowledges with a continuer "uh huh". This prompts C to continue with an expression of opinion, "I believe", which is a marker of subjectivity rather than a statement of fact, reducing the force of the proposition: "I believe this kind of research can be of immense contributions as attested ..." (lines 12–13). Notice the use of a positive evaluative word "immense" to refer to his work, which orients towards separation from EX who in the preceding turn (lines 6–8) has criticized C for making Discourse Analysis the focus of his study. In this specific moment C's disalignment and counter assertion articulates with relational separation from EX, although in the general context of a viva he is in fact performing his role as candidate defending his work.

In response, EX's seventh position overlapping turn confirms that he interprets C's reply as involving relational separation and designs his next action to project interpretations of relational separation. He rejects C's assertion without any mitigation, negating it by declaring that it is C's "impression" (line 14), and then asserting that C's "work doesn't prove that" (lines 14–15). Notice that EX's "your impression" leads back to C's "I believe". According to Perelman (1982, p. 54ff, cited in Gunthner, 1996, p. 275) 'this method of putting C in a situation of incompatibility', that his belief about his work is nothing more than an impression "is often employed in argumentation to ridicule one's opponent and make him or her lose credibility".

EX's criticism projects high relational separation, and C's subsequent action "no no my point to the place of discourse analysis in TEFL" (line 16) provides evidence of C's interpreting of relational separation. At this specific moment in talk, C is doing 'remedial work' (Goffman, 1971), which evidences orientation to some degree of relational connection with EX, the interpretation of which will be operative on EX's take. C explains what he actually means and why he is not able to show how discourse analysis contributes to TEFL: "I cannot do that (.) because there is a very large ..." (lines 16–17). But EX cuts C off, causing him to withdraw from the overlapping turn orienting to and projecting interpretations of high separation. The salient phonetic feature, notably high pitch and loud volume, which marks EX's interruptive incoming shows his awareness that C's turn has not yet ended. EX points out C's weakness "... you spend hundreds of pages on ES EFL and you were not able to relate it to second language teaching" which threatens C's face. EX's interruptive and critical uptake demonstrates his orientation to high separation from C, and provides evidence that EX's interpreting of C's prior contribution is inconsistent with C's own initial projecting.

In designing his tenth position utterance (lines 22–24) which is marked with hesitation, C does further remedial work by offering to "quote" the literature "in terms of the contribution of discourse analysis and ES EFL to TEFL", which displays an orientation to some degree of connection. EX rejects without any mitigation, stating explicitly what C should not do (line 25) and what his "job was" but failed to do (lines 25–27). This is followed by a *wh*-question which sounds more like a reproach criticizing the behaviour than a genuine question to elicit an explanation (Zimmerman, 1992). Here EX calls attention to C's infringement of expectations concerning situationally appropriate ways of doing things, and in so doing, demonstrates his orientation to his role as examiner disassociating himself from C, the examinee. In designing his turn for C as recipient, EX provides evidence that he is interpreting C's prior turn as involving separation and is projecting that C will interpret EX's response as separation.

C's subsequent response "In my conclusion section" is stopped in mid-turn by EX's strong in coming which evidences EX's orientation to high separation from C. EX begins with an acknowledgement receipt 'Yeah' followed by negative assertions "I saw your impressions, ... your feelings, your impressions, your understandings, your blah blah, blah but not your findings". The repeated accentuation of "your" highlights the subjective nature of C's assertions which are consistent with the subjective terms "feelings", "impressions" and "understandings" in contrast to the objective "findings". The phrase "I saw" asserts truth, leaving no room for doubt. At the same time the slightly derogatory expression "blah, blah, blah" suggests irritation. After a slight pause, C responds with "My findings" which is again stopped in mid-turn (line 31) by EX's incoming "are not related to TEFL at all." which completes the turn for C. The meanings and actions EX evidences in his response orients to high relational separation which projects interpretations of relational separation which will be operative on C's subsequent action.

In designing and interpreting their sequence of utterances, EX and C each forms "a sequence of interpretations that is thoroughly independent and entwined with the other's sequence of talk" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2080). As the person in power, EX's line of questioning and the way he constructs the questions and comments are instrumental to the development of the talk and the direction it takes. The initiating turn beginning with "why" sets up an expectation for C to produce a second pair part of the relevant type, which is to give a reason. In designing his next action for EX as recipient, C understands EX's prior action as a request for a reason which makes his response "because ..." as next action relevant and supportive of their relationship, projecting provisional interpretations of relational connection. The evidence provided by EX's subsequent utterances suggests interpretations of relational separation which are inconsistent with C's initial projection. EX's utterances evidence orientation to separation which becomes higher as the interaction continues. We note how EX uses his power as examiner not only to perform unmitigated face-threatening criticisms but to aggravate them by harsh and confrontational comments (e.g. "I don't care about your work"; "... your impressions, your feelings, your impressions, your understandings your blah blah blah").

5. Discussion

In an open PhD viva with members of the public and senior university staff in the audience, the session becomes more than just a site for decision making. It is also a site for displaying the examiner's knowledge in the area concerned with

the thesis under examination and for learning, especially for other postgraduate students in the audience. The question of face in terms of relational separation and connection for both examiner and candidate is particularly important in Iranian collectivist society that expects co-interactants to attend to each others' face while maintaining their own (Zuraidah and Izadi, 2011). It is interesting to note here that the criticism sequences of Excerpts 1 and 2 are delayed to later turns. Both examiners preface them with *taarof* in the preliminaries to minimize the likelihood of overt conflict, particularly with the supervisors who are senior academics and also experts in the field. The performance of *taarof* evidences the examiners' orientation to normative behaviour in Iranian culture in general, orienting to relational connection and projecting interpretations of relational connection. The positive responses from both candidates, at these specific moments in talk, evidence operative interpreting of connection.

But in the defence proper, the nature of the interaction begins to change. The examiners' absolute control of the initiating actions and topics, turn design and adjacency pair structure, and the restrictions within the question–answer or comment–response framework limit the candidates' rights and opportunities to speak. The interaction is dominated by the two examiners leaving little space for the candidates' voice. The findings also show that the examiners use the asymmetrical power relations to influence the trajectory of talk and shape of turns. As demonstrated in Excerpts 1 and 2, the examiners primarily initiate actions and solicit responses, while the candidates primarily respond to their initiatives. We can see clearly the relevance of relative status between examiner and candidate not just in the management of talk, but also in the construction of social actions and meanings. Overall both examiners' criticism turns tend to lack mitigating markers such as frequent and long pauses, filled pauses and hedging. The articulation of negative comments in 'a straightforward and unvarnished fashion' (Greatbatch, 1992) demonstrates that a viva provides for the overt production of criticisms on the part of the examiner. Criticisms are rarely mitigated and are not prefaced by preference features as in normal conversation. The examiner in Excerpt 1 makes some attempt to mitigate criticisms, but in general they are produced promptly and in a direct and straightforward manner.

In view of the goal-oriented nature of a viva, examiners are likely to face a conflict of roles. On the one hand, they have the role of assessor, charged with the duty establishing that the candidate has actually written the thesis, and that the thesis is of the standard required of a PhD. This role requires them to criticize the thesis when necessary, and criticism can lead to tension. On the other hand, as academics they also have a supportive role, which requires them to provide moral support for the candidate. Candidates also face a conflict of roles. On the one hand, they are examination candidates, and have to defer to the examiner. On the other hand, they have to present themselves as scholars in the discipline, and display sufficient academic expertise in the subject to merit the award of the PhD, which is then for them a *rite de passage* (Swales, 1990, p. 187), and to be accepted as members of their academic communities. This essentially means that they have to defend themselves against critical comments about their work. In this context, the preference for agreement in uptake (Pomerantz, 1984; Nguyen, 2005), which should result in the candidate agreeing with and also accepting criticisms, should be re-examined. In normal circumstances, in view of the asymmetrical power relations one would expect agreement. However, in a viva candidates have to demonstrate that they know their work, and so disagreement or denial rather than agreement or admission might be the preferred response (Heritage, 1984, pp. 268–269). Both candidates respond by defending their positions, resisting, indirectly disagreeing, and at times challenging the criticisms. They do not directly disagree with the examiner or challenge the criticism, or question the validity of the criticism, or ignore the criticism by not responding to it at all, but there is indeed some resistance.

It is also interesting to consider the examiners' responses to the candidates' prior turns. The candidates' defences and counteractions seem to orient to interpretations of relational separation from the examiners. Both challenge the candidates' counter arguments and defences of their positions. It is common for examiners to probe, question, and demand explanation and justification in a viva, as this will provide them with the evidence that they need to evaluate and assess the candidate. One would expect the occurrence of mild interrogatory sequences of the kind found in the examiner's turns in Excerpt 1 which while critical adhere to norms of behaviour expected of someone in her position. However, the examiner in Excerpt 2 adopts a more aggressive interrogatory stance with disagreement giving way to heated argument, as demonstrated in the sequences of critical comments. His aggressive behaviour towards the candidate causes the supervisor to intervene and defend the candidate (in a part of the viva which is not analyzed here). This demonstrates that by not showing *ehteram* (respect) not only to the candidate but also to the supervisor, the examiner does not pay sufficient attention to his own *shaxsiat* (i.e. social standing), which results in his being perceived as behaving in an unacceptable manner. The negative reaction from the supervisor and the audience supports this conclusion.

6. Conclusion

The evaluation of the candidate's thesis forms the foundation of the PhD viva, and criticisms are institutional actions and oblige the candidates to make appropriate responses. The examiners' comments and the line of questioning and the answers given in response are undertaken in order to assist the board of examiners in coming to a pass or a fail decision. In this context the candidates' talk is being assessed and evaluated, which puts them in the position of having to defend themselves. According to Drew and Heritage (1992) interpersonal relationships might be downplayed in view of the more important institutional goal to achieve, which the participants are expected to cooperate. Through evaluative criticism the examiners communicate their judgements about the quality and quantity of the research work, and in response the candidates explain

and defend their theses, and clarify aspects of their work. The criticism turns consist of expressions of disapproval, negative evaluations, statements of the act of wrongdoing, questions designed to challenge rather than a straightforward request for information (Heritage, 2012), and/or expose weaknesses and suggestions for change which orient to relational separation. Although potentially face threatening, criticisms are essentially positive and also necessary, as they provide the candidates with the opportunity to deal with some of their weaknesses and improve on their work. In this way one can regard criticism as involving some degree of separation from and connection with each other depending on how it is performed.

In conclusion, this article seeks to contribute to the emerging body of work on social interaction and the performance of a particular kind of social action. We examine criticism–criticism response sequences using an approach grounded in CA and FCT to argue “how the achieving or relational connection and separation articulates with the achieving of particular meanings and actions” in criticism–criticism response sequences (Arundale, 2010, p. 2096). The use of the PhD viva as a context demonstrates how criticism is accomplished in a speech event in which it is not only a common discourse function but also a sanctionable (if highly constrained) form of behaviour. By examining the participants’ sequenced and coordinated actions we see the way the institutional contexts of PhD vivas are maintained or transformed, and how vivas get done through specific criticism–criticism response sequences (Kasper, 2006, p. 306). While CA allows us to examine the transactional dimension of a PhD viva and the organization of turns at talk, Arundale’s FCT allows us to examine the relational aspect of interaction concerned with face.

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